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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000849

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT'S FOREIGN POLICY ADVISOR ON
TURKEY-ARMENIA, NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Classified By: AMB Marie L. Yovanovitch, reasons 1.4 (b, d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) It is in Turkish interests to ratify the protocols normalizing relations with Armenia, and for the Turks to sort out their own domestic political challenges in order to seal the deal, according to Presidential Deputy Chief of Staff Vigen Sargsian. Delay of ratification beyond January/February could, given political considerations, make successful conclusion of normalization "impossible." Any efforts to "blackmail" Armenia by demanding concessions on Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) would backfire, undermine long-term Turkish influence in the region, and derail regional integration and reconciliation for years to come. A negotiated settlement on NK cannot be rushed, and would not be sustainable if it were, Sargsian said. END SUMMARY.

GEORGIAN WAR CHANGED TURKISH CALCULATIONS

¶2. (C) Vigen Sargsian, Deputy Chief of Staff and the President's foreign policy advisor, encapsulated Armenian thinking on issues of regional integration and conflict for EUR/CARC Office Director, Ethan Goldrich, on December 1. Sargsian (no relation to President Serzh Sargsian) noted that his President had invited Turkish President Gul to Armenia two or three months prior to the Russian-Georgian war. Gul's acceptance, however, only came after the Georgian war forced Turkey to rethink its regional strategy, he said. From the Armenian perspective, the Turks realized after that conflict, if they wanted to play an expanded role in the region, an open border with Armenia was a necessary step. (COMMENT: Though Sargsian did not get into details, he likely meant that Turkey's regional energy, transportation, and security policies were undermined by the prospects of further disruptions in Georgia and evident Russian willingness to intervene in the region.) Sargsian doubted that the prospects of Turkish EU Accession were a significant motivator for the Turks in pursuing rapprochement with Armenia, taking a back seat to nearer term Turkish interest in securing greater regional influence.

TURKEY MUST SOLVE ITS OWN PROBLEMS

¶3. (C) The GOAM understands that Turkey's ratification process is a political, not legal process. With April 24 coming up (Armenia's Day of Remembrance) and a new Turkish parliamentary election cycle after that, ratification would become "increasingly difficult and at some point impossible; I don't see an opportunity after January/February," Sargsian said. He suggested that the Turkish ruling party had the muscle to get the protocols through Parliament if it wanted, but that was a "Turkish domestic problem that is not for us

to solve." He said it would not be easy for the GOT, but that ultimately it is in Turkish interests to ratify, just as it is in Armenia's.

NK NEGOTIATIONS MUST UNFOLD AT THEIR OWN PACE

¶4. (C) "We're not naive," Sargsian said: "We understand that long-term, an open border will mean a new Turkish role on all issues in the region, including Karabakh," Sargsian said. But a short-term Turkish attempt to connect Turkey-Armenia normalization to progress on NK could derail both processes. Sargsian said Armenia has been wholeheartedly searching for solutions to the NK conflict since the negotiations in Key West failed. Domestic opposition and anxiety regarding Minsk Group negotiations was heavy, he explained, and President Sargsian was ready to take political risk on Karabakh, but only in an objective, measured way. "We need a sustainable solution. You can't impose it on one party -- it won't last." He described the Turks' closing of the border as an illegal act that could not be rewarded with concessions. "Armenia won't be blackmailed." If this process fails, it will be a dramatic step backward for the whole region, he added.

¶5. (C) Regarding the outlines of an NK settlement, Sargsian said no-one would ever convince Karabakhis that they have to be part of Azerbaijan. "In 1988 they seceded in accordance with the laws of the Soviet Union, just like Latvia or Estonia," he said. Unlike Kosovo, Karabakhis have survived without international assistance. As for the Armenian-occupied territories surrounding NK, Sargsian said

YEREVAN 00000849 002 OF 002

that they were a critical component of NK security. Their return could only happen as part of a package that locks in the security of NK, backed up by international guarantees.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) Vigen Sargsian, though an advisor to President Sargsian, is more likely to reflect his boss's thinking than to significantly influence it. Recently, the President trusted his deputy enough to have him go toe-to-toe with a Turkish parliamentarian at a Marshall-Fund hosted event on normalization, and tagged him with PR responsibility on his difficult October Diaspora tour. Here too, we trust Vigen faithfully represented the President's attitudes -- most significantly, the sense that the Turkish government now needs to step up, drop its attempts to bargain for concessions on unrelated matters, and do the right thing for Turkey and the region.

YOVANOVITCH